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O R P H E U S



O R P H E U S

A Masque

MRS. FIELDS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1900

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UT MIGRATURUS HABITA

Argument

ORPHEUS, mourning for *Eurydice*, refuses to accept what life still offers him. The gods, wearied, at last permit him to seek her. He finds Hades full of shapes indicating human woe. His heart is moved, and he tries to comfort with his lyre the souls of the lost. Suddenly *Eurydice* appears, having left her happier seats, drawn hither by his notes. Orpheus, beholding her, forgets his suffering companions. She, having passed into higher conditions, is now only moved by the love which allies itself to highest good. He strives to draw her back into the bright air of Thrace; her heart still longs to succor the shapes he threatens to abandon; in vain he draws her onward to the fragrant fields; he turns to recall

[1]

Argument

to her their former joy; gently, while he gazes upon her, she recedes from his grasp; then slowly, without violence, fades out of his arms forever. He arouses himself as from a dream; he is in Thrace, alone, at his house door, in the glory of the dawn.

The day advances; pleasure seekers spread their insidious snares about him; finally he suffers himself to be led whither they will; gradually they close around him, working his destruction and death.

The Muses, in memory of his divine gift of song, restore his broken lyre and bear his body with funeral pomp to Olympos.

ORPHEUS

A Masque

ORPHEUS

S AIDST thou the day was fair?

DIONE

(Mother of Aphrodite)

Ay! and I said the arrows of the dawn
Had put to flight all shadows.

ORPHEUS

Why rouse me?
The night and day, the starlight and the
dawn
Are but as one! I know them not nor feel.

[3]

ORPHEUS

DIONE

Yet the gods call thee ! Must indeed all life
Droop and go waste because thy heart is sad !
Wilt thou not hear them from the field and
hill

Piping and whispering, longing for thy lyre
Yet daring not to ask ?

ORPHEUS

Too well they know
I cannot play again ! When she was here
Music became the tongue to voice love's
thought ;
Now love himself is dead ; or if not dead,
He vanished with my own Eurydice.

DIONE

Hast thou forgot the great ones who have
loved
As thou canst not ? They drew her to their
peace.

[4]

ORPHEUS

ORPHEUS

Who can forget that men believe these
things

Since hour by hour they come to counsel
me!

But if I cared to speak, 't were easy done,
To prove these others love not as I love,
Nor ever guess the sweetness of such love,
Nor ever knew such sorrow as I know,
Nor ever stood so lonely at the front.

DIONE

Mother of lovers am I, and many woes
These eyes have seen.

ORPHEUS

Why take the gods all joy away from life!
A feather weighs upon a saddened heart;
While for the happy nothing is too hard.
Why, my love gone, must ye still ask for
song?

ORPHEUS

DIONE

Wouldst thou in truth bring thy love back
once more

To all the evil of this pregnant world?
No shield hast thou for her save thine own
heart,

And that is mortal! Orpheus, speak, I say!
Dar'st thou petition Aïdes now to give
Thy darling to thine arms and promise
him

Never to lure her from her upward way?
Never to bind her in the ancient track?

ORPHEUS

Ay, O Dione! but why askest me?

DIONE

Because no other creature hath done this.

ORPHEUS

Because no other creature thus hath loved.

[6]

O R P H E U S

D I O N E

Father of men, ye hear him ! gods, ye hear !
Now, answer Aïdes, answer to his prayer !
Give thou him back the body of his love !
He fain would seek thy kingdom while he
looks
Back on the household ways he loved so
well !
Though mortal, he would seek the phantom
world
Where spirits wander ; try the untried deep ;
All to restore her to the fields of earth !
Is this thy prayer ? Say, Orpheus, wilt
thou thus ?

O R P H E U S

Somewhere, I know not where, Eurydice
Must mourn because I drown in misery ;
Dark is the tyranny of the hateful gods !
And yet men say : “ Behold the gods who
love,

ORPHEUS

This is their work !” Give me Eurydice !
Give me my love and I will venture all !

DIONE

Knock then thyself upon the awful gates !
Take thine own lyre and chant thy song of
love ;
Thus Cerberus and the watchers of the way
The unrepentant shades and they who guard
The throne of Aïdes shall lose their power,
And bow before thee as green rushes sway
Before the breathing of the summer wind.

ORPHEUS

Haste, haste, I go, give me the lyre once
more !
When death has taken all that made life
sweet,
We follow him, how dark soe'er the path ;
The way they went becomes the path we
love.

[8]

ORPHEUS

DIONE

Forget thou not that Aïdes bars the road ;
Unwelcome comes the uninvited guest
To his dark banquet ; laurel waits for him
Who waits to win ; the way is full of pain.

ORPHEUS

Behold the lyre ! thus armed, I go, I go !

*[He departs striking his instrument. Later he
is seen turning towards the valley of shadows. He sings :*

Where art thou, O where, my love !
Vainly I ask, in vain I weep ;
In darkness of the grave I move
Nor wake, nor do I sleep.
I pray thee whisper now to me !
And I will hear by day or night
Thee wandering by the awful sea
Or where dark woods affright ;
Whisper, only, to the leaves,
I will catch the lightest strain ;

[9]

O R P H E U S

Or if thou stir the rustling sheaves,
Thou wilt ease my pain ;
Tell thou but the shaft yon sun
Eastward sends when day is low,
Or the dew whose life is done
With the morning's glow ;
I will hear thee, darling, where
Thou art hid, and follow thee !
Dead are all things earthly fair,
Thou alone art life to me.

A company of Bacchante approach, singing
Whirl, whirl, weave and dance !
Tear the clusters from the bough !
What care we — but who art thou
Hither melancholy straying ?
Children, we, of light and chance,
Storms about thy brow are playing.

Nearer, faint-heart, wouldst thou come ?
Thou, slow-footed of the land !

O R P H E U S

And what bearest in thy hand?
Ha! a lyre! 't is Orpheus leaving
Far behind the fields of home;
Orpheus silent, hopeless, grieving.

Call him with thy little horn,
Sister of the flaming robe!
Make the mystic lyre throb!
Warm him, thou in samite swinging!
Onward by our circle borne,
Waken, O mysterious singing!

Sister, give a shriller blast!
Heedless, while we subtly weave
Wiles to hold him, see him leave
Us, forgetting, all unknowing
Of the joys which cannot last,
Where the long green grass is blowing.

Ah, who knows so well as he!
He, the singer, he who keeps

O R P H E U S

Finest sense that never sleeps ;
Waking hears the poplar moving —
Scents the honey for the bee —
Sees the thistle-down go roving.

Orpheus, why forever weep !
Come and dance while day is here !
List our voices ! never fear
Aught but pleasure from our calling !
Gay our waking, sweet our sleep,
Come before the dews are falling !

Sisters, rest ! nor weave nor dance !
Now he sees not, now he hears not ;
Thus to wander all his plot ;
Thus to waste the day in dreaming !
All unheeding is his glance,
All unseen our raiment streaming.

Watch, advance, behold his eye !
Now the rhythmic step he sees,

ORPHEUS

Now upon the wafting breeze
Comes the music of our being;
Now he will not song deny
Nor the rapture of the seeing!

Ha, he flouts us! Ha, he goes!
Bearing, silent still, his lyre.
Heaven deny him then the fire!
And if love of her is dearer
Won by weariness and woes
Aides draw him hell-ward near her!
[They pass on their way dancing.]

ORPHEUS

These creatures seem but shadows! to the
brain
Grown weary with long sorrow they ap-
pear
Strange phantoms! and they ask, alas, for
song!
They cannot see that I, a listener, hang

[13]

O R P H E U S

Like a suspended sense 'twixt earth and
heaven

To hear a finer music, nor can give
Save what is whispered me. Now all is still;
And death has sealed the fountains of my
song.

What said these? "Unavailing are our
tears," —

We lovers know that tears bedew the heart
And keep our sorrows green. Let all men
weep,

All who can love!

Now to the gate of Dreams!
A dim, low passage for a thing so fair,
But I have searched and found all access
barred

Save this mysterious path where once I met
Her veiled face, that vanished soon as seen;
Open, ye darksome passage, to my song!

O R P H E U S

Orpheus sings.

Turn ye on your silver hinges,
O ye gates of dream !
Let me tread the shadowy fringes
Of your mystic stream !

*[The song dies away ; he advances and is lost
in the shadows. Presently his voice is heard
once more.]*

Now, my beloved, I am near thee !
The sun is set,
The day is gone,
With all the labor and the fret
Of things to do, of things undone.

At dawn I could not find thy face !
In the great music, all the grace
Of love that filled these willing hands
With labor in the harvest lands
Awoke no canticles of praise.

O R P H E U S

And in the noon, in the high noon,
The contest of the earth and sky,
The struggle of contrasted will,
From the mart and from the mill,
The agonies of triumph and of loss
Bound me and held me where the pathways
cross.

But now, dear love,
The awful sun is set ;
All the great world is still !
The planets, the white moon,
The silent stars above
Begin to work their own mysterious will.

This hour is thine and mine !
The gateway of the world behind me lies
Shut ; now am I free
To throw me in thine arms and rest and
weep
Beyond the sphere of sleep.

O R P H E U S

[Another pause, — again his voice is heard.]

Behold a shrouded figure! Art thou she?
Ah no! and now another! What are
these?

They nearer creep, and now I see a throng
Of men and women, who with anxious
brows

Are drawing towards me full of eager hope.
They wear strange forms, but this one once
I knew;

And now I find another in yon face!
Their figures all have grown misshapen
here;

They creep, or crawl, or bear them sadly
bent

As worn with undue burdens. Ha! they
come

To lay their hands upon me! but they
hide

Their heads, and impotent advance; averse
In jealousy that one should see them thus,

O R P H E U S

And live and carry back the bitter tale
Into the realms where men yet live and
love.

Love! The word bears me home! What
can I do!

She is not there; surely she is not here
Commingle with this crowd of dreadful
forms;

Perchance if I should ask, or should entreat,
And help them with their burthens for a
space,

Surely they would forgive me and would
speak

Of what they know, nor curse me that I
came.

He advances, sounding his lyre.

Sorrowful companions, stay!

What unsounded deeps of wrong

Have ye passed to find this way

In a dreadful throng!

[18]

O R P H E U S

Woe is me! I did not know
From the stem such fruit could grow!

Were ye motherless and lone?
Knew ye never guiding hand?
Heard ye never pity's tone
Out of love's green land?
Shadows dark, in dark are ye;
Shapes of shapeless misery.

Must I seek the living here
In these chambers of the dead?
Through this dreadful night of fear
Has my darling sped?
Can ye cast one dismal gleam
On, beyond yon blackening stream?

Slow I see Truth's awful eye
Like a dim, unsetting sun,
Gazing from eternity
On my life undone!

[19]

O R P H E U S

Whither, whither, from this blight
May I turn to find the light?

Long my disobedient heart,
Wandering in a maze of grief,
Wilfully has dwelt apart,
Dead as autumn's leaf!
Blind, rebellious, have I been.
Now I see and know my sin!

Can ye tell me where she waits
For my coming? She could drive
Evil even from these gates
And your hearts revive!
Listen for her lightest call!
Have ye heard her footstep fall?

One replies.

Hollow and strange are the voices that echo
in these dark dominions,
Strange are the forms we inhabit, and yet
in the dark thou didst know us,

[20]

O R P H E U S

Seeing that we are the same, and our faces
betray us more truly ;

We are the same, did I say ? Is the man
there the same as the child is ?

And the tree, though bent to the ground,
the same, though growing unlovely ?

Eternal is life, and we who have yielded to
wrong or indulgence

Day by day we are changing in shape, while
unconscious we wander

Till glassed in the eyes of our mates, we see
the distortions of evil.

Builders indeed were we made, and the
framers of fate unforeseeing,

To build with the hours while they speed,
to grow while the sunsets are fading.

But vain is the teaching of souls, when the
whisper of pleasure is sweeter.

Thy question is useless indeed ; we know
not ourselves where we wander.

ORPHEUS

Dear is the face of a man, and the voice of
a brother unhopèd for.

Stay, ah ! stay, and tell us again if indeed
thou canst help us.

*[They stretch their shadowy arms towards him,
as he turns from them.]*

ORPHEUS

Look ! behold, a vision comes !

My belovèd, is it thou !

Paler than when flower-strewn rooms

Sheltered thy fair brow.

Ah ! the sorrow I have known !

Ah ! 't is thou, the perfect one.

A pale form floats toward him.

EURYDICE

Orpheus, belovèd !

Thy lyre, I hear it,

Thy voice and none other !

The love of immortals

Rings over thy pauses.

[22]

O R P H E U S

I have waited and listened
To hear thy soft clangor ;
Too long all was silent !
Our joy was delaying !
Where wert thou, belovèd,
While sorrow was longing
To list thy consoling !

O R P H E U S

Love, without thee I was dumb ;
'T was thy spirit bade me sing ;
Only when toward thee I come
Will my lyre ring.
Thou, my life, Eurydice,
Fade thou not again from me !

E U R Y D I C E

Where are the sufferers,
They who were with thee,
Troop of the woe-worn ?
Wert thou not pleading

[23]

O R P H E U S

How out of darkness,
Through grief and repentance,
And grace of Olympos,
Their hearts should be changed ?
Too great was thy labor
For one newly born !
I listened, I pleaded,
I carried thy prayer up,
And flitted towards thee
To lighten thy burden
And show thee the path ;
Where have they vanished ?
I see them not, Orpheus.

O R P H E U S

How could I know ! in this dark
They have hid themselves away ;
Out, like an extinguished spark,
Fell the dread array,
When the whiteness of thy face
Made a lamp in this black place.

[24]

O R P H E U S

E U R Y D I C E

Swift, let us find them !
Draw from thy lyre
The tenderest longing !
Their hope of forgiveness
Is waning in darkness.
Ah ! tell them once more
The love of the holy !
Sing as thou sangest
When first I heard thee
Afar by the throne ;
My heart turned to listen
And knew the dear accents,
And leaped to behold thee !
O Orpheus, belovèd,
Save now the forsaken,
The wretched, the lonely !
For this tune thy lyre,
Sing thus and forever !

O R P H E U S

Remember, my Orpheus,
They sought thee, the sad ones
Who dwell on the earth-plain,
When first I was taken
Away from thine arms ;
For now he will sing us
They cried, us, forsaken,
Of the light of the future,
The joy of his bride !
He will know, they protested,
The secrets long hidden,
The meaning of pain.
What gladness to him
To companion the lonely,
To soothe the distracted,
To nourish the hungry,
The waiting ones cried.
But alas ! only wailing,
And blackness, and mourning,
And silence for music
Was found in the land !

O R P H E U S

Now hast thou discovered
The way of renewal,
The pathway of love !

O R P H E U S

Plead thus ever ! Let me stand
Listening thus to hear thy voice
Patient in this clouded land,
Haven, not of choice !
Darling, backward let us roam
Toward the sunny vales of home.

E U R Y D I C E

Faintly.

Hear'st thou no wailing ?
See'st thou not figures
Dim in the darkness
Stooping with burdens ?
Follow, belovèd ;
Vainly they beckon,
Vainly they search for

[27]

O R P H E U S

The path interdicted.
Once more strike the chord ;
Bid them draw nearer,
Nor seek what is hopeless,
Nor thus yearn and suffer.
But chant to them, Orpheus,
And tell them, together,
In love and in longing
We pray for them, carry them,
Through the great future,
Out to their peace.

O R P H E U S

Who has been moving back, and drawing her, unconsciously, after him.

Come thou, Eurydice ! I breathe
Airs that long have been too strange ;
See'st thou not yon soft blue wreath ?
Feel'st thou not the change ?
Roofs of home, what sight so dear !
Hasten, hasten, we draw near !

[28]

O R P H E U S

E U R Y D I C E

More faintly still.

Where are they, where?
Yonder I see them
They point us back earthward,
Where fain they would follow;
Back to the sweetness
Of earth and the sun.
Again they have vanished!
Ah, let us not leave them
Wailing in anguish!

O R P H E U S

Grasping Eurydice and gazing back upon her.

Eurydice, behold our door!
Was there ever scene so fair?
See the hillside's grassy floor!
Breathe this flower-strewn air!
What is this! Eurydice!
Thou turn'st thy face away from me!

ORPHEUS

EURYDICE

Lov'st thou me, Orpheus?
The world then will hate thee!
The past days are vanished,
They bury their dead!
Come, follow and succor
With love and rejoicing
The spirits repentant.

[She disengages herself from him.]

I go! Wilt thou follow?
The pathway is easy;
Come, quick now, descending
My garments shall guide thee,
I, flitting before thee.

*[She is gone; Orpheus stands dazzled in the
light of morning, alone.]*

ORPHEUS

Day, day of the earth, how garish is thy
light!
My dawn has vanished, she was all my sun!

[30]

O R P H E U S

Was it in dream I held my love again
There in the fearful dark of Aïdes world?
Was it in dream I strove to bring her
back

Out of the blackness to her radiant home?
I thought I lured her to this upper air
To see the shafts of morning gild the roof
That sheltered our young love.
Truer that vision than this waking hour!
More welcome that dark region than this
pain!

She strove to lead me to my finer self,
And I, and I — listened, but would not
hear!

In spite of all the warnings of the gods,
I turned, and looking back on the old days,
Could not believe that I must follow her
Into a rarer ether washed of this,
If I would win my way whither she dwells
Immortally!

[He sinks in thought.]

O R P H E U S

Ah ! Now I see, too coarse,
With robes of flesh upon me, is my sense.
I was not ready, and I could not stay !
A long and weary road these feet must
pass
Before they find that holy lamp again.
“Cease not to strike thy lyre,” behold she
said !
And thus, perhaps, her spirit will not fail
Yet to forgive, and whisper in my song
And yield the motive, else the strings are
mute.

He sings.

Close at thy side, I climb the steep,
After the day, when eve is fair, —
The young moon leans, the young dew
weep,
I draw thee, through the frosty air
Up to an unknown height
In the lone night.

[32]

O R P H E U S

Climb, ever climb! I hold thee yet
Within the solitude of rooms;
In midnight hours when moons are set,
Or summer sleeps in mist of blooms
Still do I hold thee near,
O thou most dear!

I seem to hear her speak!

Now, all is still!

Alas! Alas!

[*He weeps.*]

In the distance are seen the Bacchantae, who again advance dancing and singing. Suddenly they perceive Orpheus.

Look! Ah, look! 'T is Orpheus there!
Now, wild sisters, seize your prey!
Dark with clouds his brow to-day;
Whither have his feet been straying
Since we saw him full of care,
In what wilderness delaying?

[33]

L

ORPHEUS

They approach nearer, chanting in wily and caressing tones.

Come, belovèd Orpheus, come !
Do not fear our merry troop.
Here, within the flying loop
Of our scarf, behold, is hidden
One, the sunlight of thy home !
Happy lover, hither bidden !

Orpheus, attracted to the gay circle, looks in vain among the dazzling group to find Eurydice. He faintly strikes the lyre and sings.

Youth and love are fled together ;
Where are they ?
Will they come again in the Summer
weather,
When earth is gay ?

Again he sinks into reverie ; then, as if lighted by a sudden hope, he chants :

O love, who art our very self, a thing
More dear than what we call our very own !

O R P H E U S

How should we discords play on that fine
string

And our heart's queen discrown?

Must thy seat yet stand empty at the feast?
Shall no one fill the place of that sweet
ghost?

Her presence walks when we attend her
least,

Nor comes when longed for most.

O heart of flame! The day is dying down;
The sunset fades apace! Claim one more
kiss!

This little hour is all that we may own!
The dawn is bred of this!

[He gazes intently in hope of seeing Eurydice.]

(THE BACCHANTÆ *shout*)

(Ha! Ha! Still he seeks his love!)

O R P H E U S

Orpheus, strike thy lyre again !
Sound the gay, the dancing strain
You and she have timed together,
Long ago in yon fir-wood grove,
In the fruitful autumn weather.

Sisters, onward, find the wood,
Swifter than the long-eared hare !
Onward through the scented air
Sisters, to the shaded pleasaunce !
Fruits and dropping nuts our food
And the tame and shining pheasants.

Bid him here forever dwell ;
(Sisters, do not break the ring !)
Here he shall forever sing.
Quickly cast the scarf about him !
Draw him, hold him, all is well !
Now shall no false footstep rout him !

*[Orpheus, catching the spirit of youth and
pleasure, moves in the dance, and plays the*

O R P H E U S

lyre as he moves. They pass through a woodland path, into a green pleasaunce, where the long hours flit away in dalliance. Suddenly he pauses :

O R P H E U S *chants*

Hear ye the hermit thrush?
All heaven is in his voice!
Dance ye and be gay!
I pause to hear what the bird shall say,
Who maketh choice
Of the green dark and holy hush.

Born of the dark,
Music is mine,
Music and wine ;
Child of the spark,
Born into pain,
Thine shall remain
The loss and the gain.

O R P H E U S

Children of earth,
The hour of death,
The hour of birth,
Slow is the coming,
Awful the breath.

BACCHANTAE

In anger.

Out, alas! We are too late;
He has touched forbidden fruit
And poisoned pleasure's very root!
Not for us his broken measure!
He has stolen through death's gate
Striving thus to snatch his treasure.

Seize the robber! Cast him hence,
Fling him down the death-black stream!
What to us is ghost or dream!
Gone is all his hope of glory!
Naught to us is where or whence,
Naught is time, and naught is story.

[38]

O R P H E U S

Scornful are we of his tears !
He who loves nor death nor life,
Ever groaning, still at strife
Thus because his love has vanished !
Death he fears, and life he fears,
From the joy of love self-banished.

Tear him ! Rend the hated limbs !
Cast them on the trusty wave,
Wave that givest what life gave
Back into the deathless waters !
Let our curses be his hymns ;
Fling him down, love-crownèd daughters !

*[In wild fury they cast themselves upon him,
and he is seen no more. Far away, in the
dawn, the head of Orpheus and the broken
lyre are discovered floating in the stream
while the Bacchantae dance away, their fig-
ures outlined upon the green hill-tops.*

*Slowly the Muses approach and follow the
winding shores until they gather the sacred
relics, whence they bear them to Olympus.*

O R P H E U S

*During the funeral rites, Erato leads the
chant, striking the restored lyre of Orpheus.*

F U N E R A L C H A N T O F T H E M U S E S

Gather, ye lovers, on the sacred hill,
For here a lover lies !
And weep ye for the music that is mute !
Nor lyre, nor flute,
Nor nightingale can fill
The heart nor flood the eyes
With tenderness like his !
Wilt thou refuse me this
O lyre ! to sing our sorrow,
To chant our loss !
May grief's bitterness not borrow
Sweetness from thy source ?

Tell me, lyre,
What song will he desire,
He who alone was master of thy chords ?
Will he forbid our tears

O R P H E U S

Knowing all grief must pass ?
All grief, all fears !
Come lovers, late I hear,
(Come, lay your ear,)
A sudden stirring as of streams in Spring ;
A leaping note of gladness
After waste and sadness ;
Now the chords responsive ring !
Behold them lead, in steadfast joy and real,
The immortal chorus, chorus hymeneal.

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